

The Evil of Forgetting

By

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July 6th 2025

“Now these are the names of the children of Israel who came to Egypt; each man and his household came with Jacob: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah; Issachar, Zebulun, and Benjamin; Dan, Naphtali, Gad, and Asher. All those who were descendants of Jacob were seventy persons (for Joseph was in Egypt already). And Joseph died, all his brothers, and all that generation. But the children of Israel were fruitful and increased abundantly, multiplied and grew exceedingly mighty; and the land was filled with them.”

-Exodus 1:1-7

We are now beginning our study in the book of Exodus. As we talked about last week, the book of Exodus is the center of God's covenant with the Jewish people. During the book of Genesis we got to see God call a single man, Abraham, and grow that man into a clan of people made up of 12 distinct tribes. In this book, we will see God grow that clan into a people group, and then deliver that people group from bondage in Egypt. He then begins to draw those people towards a “promised land” where He will set them up as a nation state with their own sovereign borders as well as their own system of governance under Him. It is this particular nation, Israel, made up of a very particular ethnic group, the Jews, that God makes His official covenant with.

Because of this goal, God is trying to show His people how to set up the kind of nation that He would dwell within and govern over. In order to do this though, He needs for them to see a corrupt nation and learn from their mistakes that they might choose His way and not the way of the pagans. So, in this paper we will look at the first chapter of Exodus and see the main themes of the book illustrated for us. By understanding these themes we will hopefully gain a better understanding of this book as a whole, but also we will be able to see how these ancient stories still bear great relevance for us today.

Founding Narratives

One of the main things that this book teaches us is the importance of a founding story in the establishment of a new identity. At some level we all understand this, when we watch a superhero movie, we first need to understand their motivation and direction, why they are behaving the way that they are and why they oppose the specific people and actions that they do. In order to do this we need an “origin story” or as I am calling it a “founding narrative”. This reality plays itself out in the real world as well. This is down

to the individual level when Christians tell their testimonies, but also in relationships when a couple tells the story of how they met and fell in love.

Companies will also tell the story of their founding, and nations establish days to celebrate their own founding narrative. Take our own nation as an example. Every fourth of July we celebrate our nation's founding and we meditate on our founding narrative. In school we learn about the British tyranny over the colonies and how our founding fathers declared their independence from the British crown on July fourth 1776 which kicked off the bloody Revolutionary War that earned us our independence.

As stated before, these founding narratives carry deep significance and remind us of our identity and our overall orientation. Think of this book as the founding narrative of the people of Israel.

The Evil of Forgetting

"Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph."
-Exodus 1:8

Very early on in this book we see the importance of the "founding narrative". As an introduction to the evil tyranny of Egypt we are given a strange cause for this evil arising: *"Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph."* As simple as this statement is, it carries with it a lot of weight. The founding narrative for this new situation in Egypt, where the people of Israel are dwelling within the land of Egypt has already been given to us at the end of Genesis. In this founding narrative we are taught of how the entire Middle East faced an existential crisis from a massive seven year famine and how both the Egyptians and the Israelites were preserved from this famine by the God of the Israelites and through the counsel of an Israelite slave, Joseph.

It is this story that served as the basis for peace between two very different people groups within the same nation. We are told that this peace lasted for a time, until there arose a new king who did not know Joseph. What this teaches us is the importance of remembering and the evil of forgetting. I love how the American author Bruce Feiler puts this point:

"The story begins with forgetting. The pharaoh does not remember how a son of Israel saved Egypt from famine. The rest of the Five Books of Moses becomes an antidote to this state of forgetfulness. God hears the groaning of Israel and 'remembers His covenant' (Exodus 2:24). Moses leads the Israelites from Egypt and urges them to 'remember this day' (Exodus 13:3). The Israelites are ordered to 'remember the Sabbath day' (Exodus 20:8), and to observe Passover as a 'day of remembrance'

(Exodus 12:14). Moses's goal is to build a counter Egypt... to construct a society that offers an alternative to ignorance and unknowingness. He must devise a community that remembers."

-Bruce Feiler

It is our memories that preserve our identity, we need to preserve these memories lest we forget the lessons of the past and doom ourselves to folly and ungratefulness. A movie that illustrates this point very well is "The Bourne Identity". In this movie, the main character is rescued from drowning by a fishing boat, but he has lost his memories, and therefore, he has lost himself. The rest of the movie has him learning about his shadowy past as an American assassin while he is being hunted by other assassins from his former unit.

It is a truly excellent action movie, but the idea behind it makes it a very thought provoking movie. As he learns more about his past, he begins to lose himself, torn between who he was and who he wants to be. It isn't until he remembers that the reason he lost his memory in the first place is because he made a decision to walk away from the program, which led to him being shot and left for dead. It is only when he remembers that choice that he is set free from his past and given the ability to start a new life in light of his new founding story.

"Because My people have forgotten Me, They have burned incense to worthless idols. And they have caused themselves to stumble in their ways, From the ancient paths, To walk in pathways and not on a highway, To make their land desolate and a perpetual hissing; Everyone who passes by it will be astonished And shake his head."

-Jeremiah 18:15-16

Throughout the Old Testament, this is the pattern. The people of God remain faithful as long as they *remember* the goodness of God. But the Bible teaches us that we are prone to forget, prone to wander from the goodness of our God because we don't hold onto our memories of His faithfulness towards us. Because of this, when trials come, we forget what God has done and we walk away from Him. This reality is true in every respect. When a couple forgets the love that they had for one another, they can fixate on present issues and future worries and allow those things to undo all the faithfulness of their past.

"Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love."

-Revelation 2:4

This is also true for nations themselves. Because the Egyptians failed to retain the memories of the past, they had grown fearful and mistrusting of the people of Israel, this made them see the Israelites as enemies as opposed to allies. The move to oppress the people then becomes a “pre-emptive” strike driven by fear and paranoia over what the people of Israel might do. When a nation forgets their past, they are doomed to either repeat past mistakes. It is important to remember that a key component to the story of Joseph is how his story began by being betrayed by his brothers and sold into slavery. The crisis that he averts was, partly, driven by the envy of his brothers and the betrayal of those whom he had not harmed. In the same way, Egypt is repeating this very same folly, betraying the Jewish people, seemingly without cause.

Founding Myths

“Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. And he said to his people, “Look, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we; “come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and it happen, in the event of war, that they also join our enemies and fight against us, and so go up out of the land.” Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh supply cities, Pithom and Raamses. But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew. And they were in dread of the children of Israel. So the Egyptians made the children of Israel serve with rigor. And they made their lives bitter with hard bondage—in mortar, in brick, and in all manner of service in the field. All their service in which they made them serve was with rigor.”

-Exodus 1:8-12

Another danger that this story can teach us is the danger of mythologizing our past. Most people groups have a founding narrative, but they are almost always told in a mythical way. Usually a nation is founded by either a demi-god or a god in their own power. They usually have to overcome some mythological evil and this allows them to establish their nation on the corpse of their vanquished foe.

Although I won't get too into this, I do find this interesting. There was a French Catholic philosopher named Rene Girard who taught at university a couple decades ago. This truly brilliant man came up with a fascinating theory about ancient myths that I think has great relevance to our own study. Girard was always taken by the boast of Satan in the gospels:

“Then the devil, taking Him up on a high mountain, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said to Him, “All this authority I will give You, and their glory; for this has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish.”

-Luke 4:5-6

What struck Girard as strange was the fact that Jesus doesn't question this boast. But how can Satan, whose name literally means "adversary", set up kingdoms of peace when all he knows how to do is stand in opposition? His theory was that Satan created peace in various kingdoms through what Girard called "the scapegoat mechanism". This is where a ruler finds a people group to place all of the nation's problems upon in order to establish internal peace within the nation. In other words, since Satan is defined by his opposition, the only way that he can create "peace" is by finding a rallying people around a common enemy.

He then believed that the myths that came out of the nations were cosmic retellings of the original founding story. To put it another way, all of the pagan myths that we know are based on actual historical events, but they have been filtered through a mythological lens. The reason for this, is in order to create lasting peace, there is no room for ambiguity, we have to see ourselves as being unambiguously right and for the one that we have allied against to be unambiguously wrong. This helps our conscience and allows us to vindicate all the messy things that we might have needed to do in order to "win" and find peace.

Modern Founding Myths

This point will hopefully become more clear if we go through specific examples. On a small scale think about a couple who get a divorce. This event becomes a founding story of their new, separated, identity. If you have ever known anyone who has gotten a divorce, you know how common it is for them to "mythologize" their relationship. In their telling, they were the innocent victim who married a terrible, narcissistic, demon who corrupted them and held them captive until they finally saw their true nature and broke free. However, if you knew the couple throughout their relationship, you will see the inconsistencies within their story. You will know that reality is more complex than they are making it, and actually, even if they were the primary victim of the marriage, they still did have some part to play in the toxic dynamic.

On a national level we can see this playing out as well. This is an aside, but this is one of the reasons why the Bible is so beautiful and has proved itself to be genuinely inspired by God. The same issues we see at play in a book written over three thousand years ago remain just as relevant today as when it was first written. And to be honest, it is this very issue that I believe is the most threatening to our world today.

For the modern western world, I would say that our founding story would be World War 2. While it would be hard to imagine a more evil system than the Nazi's and their mass genocide towards the Jewish people, but also the brutal campaign they waged against

Europe resulting in the deaths of millions of people. However, in spite of all of these facts, reality is still more complex than we tend to imagine it. As bad as Hitler and the Axis powers were, they were not demons from Hell, they were men who participated in similar sins as the Pharaoh of Egypt. They believed the Nazi propaganda because Germany was laid waste by the Allies after World War 1 and they needed a Scapegoat to unify them, and the Jews made a convenient group of people for their twisted purposes.

And the allies were not angels sent from God combatting the forces of darkness. The truth is, that in order to defeat one devil, we had to make a deal with, arguably, a worse devil, Stalin. In order to beat Germany, the west allied themselves with the Soviet Union who were being led by the second worst mass murderer in world history, Joseph Stalin. Second only to Mao Tse Tung in China, Stalin was responsible for somewhere between 5 and 60 million murdered people from his own nation. He presided over one of the most brutal and wicked campaigns of mass incarceration and forced, intentional starvation under the Gulag work camps.

But if this is true, why is it that students learn extensively about the Nazi concentration camps, but they rarely are taught the worse evils of Soviet Russia or communist China? The answer is within our founding myth. World War 2 has become more myth than history in the minds of modern westerners. That is why, if I wanted to insult someone, I could do more damage to their reputation by calling them a Nazi, Fascist, or Hitler than calling them a Devil or Satanist. But if Hitler is Satan, or in some people's imaginations, even worse than Satan, then whoever opposed him possesses a moral covering. As a result, though Stalin was unavoidably wicked, there exists a strange veil over his atrocities because of the part he played in defeating Hitler.

This is why there will never be an American fascist party, but there are politicians right now who openly declare that they are socialists, like Bernie Sanders and the current New York Mayoral frontrunner Zohran Mamdani. Anything even remotely associated with Hitler is taboo, for instance Hitler was a nationalist and therefore any form of nationalism is considered fascistic. And yet, politicians can openly advocate for the same types of policies pursued by Communist China or Soviet Russia and there's relatively mild backlash.

This myth also affects the nation of Israel. The Jews were the ones most persecuted by Hitler during World War 2, and due to the Nazi persecution, the Zionist movement received enough organic momentum to build a homeland for the Jews. Once again, the real story of the founding of Israel in 1948 is much more nuanced than what I have the

time to talk about here, but this founding does hold a powerful weight in the modern imagination.

So what's the danger? Myths like this can't stand the test of time. To remember our past is to be faithful with reality. We have done a poor job of preserving the past and learning the appropriate lessons from the past, and so, the World War 2 world is falling away, the western alliance is fragmented to say the least and because of this, there is a massive reversal happening. Now both the political left and right are seeking a new "founding myth".

For the left, this is pretty obvious. For a while now they have seen their founding narrative as the Civil Rights Movement. They have artificially clung to some of Martin Luther King's more socialistic ideas, and ignored his more Christian and conservative ideas. This founding story is about American oppression against the dispossessed, the racial minorities, immigrants, women, and queer sexualities. Therefore, the left is always looking for new "martyrs" to show forth this "mythologized" history where America, and the west more generally, are a stand in for all that is wrong and evil. This is why they use language like "slavery was America's original sin". And why people like Hanna Nicole Smith try to say that the real founding of America was 1619 when the first slaves were brought to our shores. They have even tried to argue that the Revolutionary War was fought to preserve the institution of slavery.

A great recent example would be George Floyd. There was a legitimate push to essentially look at Floyd as a saint by the left, this is why they put his face on murals and named streets after him. Even though he was far from a saint, they made him into a face for their movement, an image of their narrative of black men being indiscriminately persecuted by American oppression. This also turned Derek Chauvin, the officer who knelt on Floyd while he died, into a devil.

It is for this reason that the political left has turned against Israel. Their new myth teaches them that the west is the problem, and unsuccessful groups are only that way because of western oppression. As such, Israel for them is an outpost of the west and the neighboring Muslim countries are the oppressed that are being held down by western colonialism. This is why Whoopi Goldberg insisted that the Jews killed in the Holocaust were white. This is also why politicians on the left, like Zohran Mamdani, can call to "globalize the intifada", which is an Arabic word that means "uprising" used to describe violent, revolutionary acts perpetrated against Israel by their Muslim neighbors, with little to no backlash. This is also why an artist named "Bob Villain" could lead a crowd of people in a chant of "death to the IDF" at a concert in Glastonbury over the previous weekend.

For the modern right, I would say that our new founding myth was Covid. The overt and clear corruption of our elite institutions on display during the lockdowns might have been the greatest failure of elites in a nation since World War 1. As a result, this new founding myth for the right sees the elite institutions as the devil that are hiding truth and preventing us from being free. As a result the new right is skeptical of anything mainstream and anything that they were taught as kids.

This has bred a more isolationist fervor in the right wing of the country, and a firm hatred for anything establishment. This means that conspiracy theories are rampant on the right and Israel also is problematic for the new right. The reason for this is a little more complex than the left, but nonetheless real. For some of the more radical members of the new right, Jews represent the elite structures that betrayed us. For others, modern Israel represents another corrupt western outpost that has, unjustly, drained our resources and fueled the modern military industrial complex.

This also has something to do with the death of the World War 2 myth. For them, since the story that they were told is not as clean as they thought, this disproves the whole thing. This is why commentators like Tucker Carlson can prop up the “historian”, Darryl Cooper, claiming that Churchill was the real villain of World War 2. This is obviously a ridiculous claim, but when you hate the establishment, any narrative that contradicts the “accepted” narrative sounds right. The destruction of this myth calls into question the legitimacy of the Jewish state which, in the imaginations of most westerners, was founded in response to World War 2 through European influence in the Middle East. This means that the modern right is either neutral to Israel or antagonistic.

Principalities and Powers

“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.”

-Ephesians 6:12

This modern reality should reveal to us the mistake of mythologizing the past. When the apostle Paul tells us that we “do not wrestle against flesh and blood...” among other things, he is warning us that while men can participate with demons, they remain men and don’t become pure demons. And while men can be filled with the Holy Spirit, they remain men and are not infallibly good. Unfortunately, reality is messy, and even the best nations or people groups can become corrupt over time. When we tell ourselves useful fables in order to vindicate ourselves, we remove the humanity of our opponents

and we become blind to our own faults that might lead us down similar paths. The Israelites are kept from making this mistake by God by preserving the memory of this story.

While the Pharaoh in this story is depicted as evil, he is also a sympathetic figure. We are directly told in the beginning that Israel was indeed growing and developing within his nation. Beyond that, these foreign people had a heritage of extreme influence at the heights of Egyptian power and they were not assimilating with the Egyptians. God had intentionally made His people shepherds, which we are told is an abominable profession to the Egyptian people. The result is that the Egyptians had an extremely successful group of foreigners living in their midst who also had political influence.

Beyond that, while the Pharaoh's sins are recounted to us, he is never really shown to be a demon or inhuman, he is just a man that makes terrible mistakes based on his own pride and foolishness. Also, the Egyptian people aren't guilty of Pharaoh's mistakes, in fact even his advisors begin to beg him to let the people of Israel go when God begins to reign down plagues on Egypt.

And far from the people of Israel being depicted as the incorruptible heroes of the story, they initially reject the salvation that Moses offers, and consistently doubt God during the plagues and even after when they are wandering in the wilderness. This is why, as a part of the Passover feast, the Israelites had to mark their own door posts with the blood of a lamb so that God would "pass over" their homes and spare their firstborn. This is God directly telling His people that they are not a heroic people group being persecuted by a demonic overlord, but that they too bore sin and it was God's grace that preserved them.

"The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; "but because the LORD loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt."

-Deuteronomy 7:7-8

This story then is not about "good guys" and "bad guys", but instead the story begins to reflect the nuances of reality and tells us the nature of how evil can corrupt all of us if we are not careful. This is why, even in these initial books, Moses is tempted to become a tyrant like Pharaoh, and the people of Israel actually practice the same tyrannical practices of slavery and infanticide throughout their history. When this happens, the

biblical authors are not shy about telling the nation that they are falling into the same evil that the Egyptians had fallen into.

This instinct is preserved in the founding of the Church. Even though the Jewish and Roman leaders committed the evil of crucifying Christ, they are again, not depicted as demons. They are shown to be selfish, vain, corrupt, and venal, but their motives are understandable. Beyond that, the founders of the church, the apostles, aren't portrayed much better. After all, Judas betrays Jesus to death and the other apostles abandon Him in His time of greatest need.

This is why Christians often picture themselves in this narrative as those who cried out for His execution. Note the words of the famous Christian Hymn, "How Deep the Father's Love For Us:

*"Behold the man upon a cross,
My sin upon His shoulders;
Ashamed, I hear my mocking voice
Call out among the scoffers.
It was my sin that held Him there
Until it was accomplished;
His dying breath has brought me life –
I know that it is finished.
-Stuart Townend - "How Deep The Father's Love For Us"*

As Christians we are asked to identify ourselves with the villains of the story. The reason is simple. We are not the incorruptible Son of God who died for the world, we are fallen and sinful people whose sins made the cross necessary. Since we know the temptations of our own heart, we are more worried about our own corruption than the corruption of the world. We know that we too can become tools of the "rulers of this dark age..." That means that any movement, no matter how beautiful, can become corrupt. If the nation of Israel can lose their way, any movement can equally lose their way.

This instinct was planted in the hearts of our founders. They didn't depict Britain as a demonic power holding them captive, but as an unjust human government that we needed to be independent of. This is why the founders placed checks and balances in their government. They knew that they too could fall to the same exact temptations of Britain and therefore they needed to put themselves in check. This is also why George Washington voluntarily stepped down after two terms.

This same spirit of true remembrance ought to be the animating principle in Christians. I like how Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn put it after surviving the tremendous evils of the Soviet Gulags:

“It was granted me to carry away from my prison years on my bent back, which nearly broke beneath its load, this essential experience: how a human being becomes evil and how good. In the intoxication of youthful successes I had felt myself to be infallible, and I was therefore cruel. In the surfeit of power I was a murderer, and an oppressor. In my most evil moments I was convinced that I was doing good, and I was well supplied with systematic arguments. And it was only when I lay there on rotting prison straw that I sensed within myself the first stirrings of good. Gradually it was disclosed to me that the line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either—but right through every human heart—and through all human hearts... And since that time I have come to understand the falsehood of all the revolutions in history: They destroy only those carriers of evil contemporary with them (and also fail, out of haste, to discriminate the carriers of good as well). And they then take to themselves as their heritage the actual evil itself, magnified still more.”

-Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn - “The Gulag Archipelago”

If we fail to remember this simple truth, we will end up more corrupt than the ones we so readily oppose. I'm sure that the Egyptians who followed Pharaoh in his plan thought they were doing the right thing, we too must be careful as to the ideology that is carrying us forward and where it might lead us.

The Chosen People

“‘You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to Myself. ‘Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. ‘And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel.”

-Exodus 19:4-6

This point relates to this original persecution of the Jews that persists to this day. When God selects His people, this also makes them a target for His adversary, Satan.

“Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars. Then being with child, she cried out in labor and in pain to give birth. And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven

diadems on his heads. His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born. She bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her Child was caught up to God and His throne. Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days.

-Revelation 12:1-6

Satan knew that the Messiah would come from the Israelites and so he tried to destroy the nation of Israel, here portrayed as a woman clothed with the sun. This persecution starts here with Pharaoh, but continues with the Canaanites, Haman, Greece, and finally Rome. But lest we think that Satan loses interest after Messiah has come:

“Now when the dragon saw that he had been cast to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male Child.” But the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent. So the serpent spewed water out of his mouth like a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away by the flood. But the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed up the flood which the dragon had spewed out of his mouth. And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.”

-Revelation 12:13-17

Satan continues to persecute the “woman”, Israel, and “her offspring”, the church. Anyone who is even somewhat familiar with world history knows this. The Jewish people have suffered numerous persecutions, pogroms, ghetto's, and concentration camps throughout the last two thousand years. And, to my knowledge, they are the only nation I am aware of that has looming over its head a constant existential threat from its neighbors. Whatever our politics might be, and whatever our views of God's plan for the nation of Israel, as a general rule we should not be comfortable with our enemies' plans. Even if we forget the people of Israel, Satan clearly has not forgotten, and he continues to persecute them.

This does not mean that all of the hatred for Israel is purely demonic. Just like most other things in this world, the supernatural seems to reveal itself through natural means. I think that Thomas Sowell probably does the best job by showing a different pattern of wickedness that does uniquely hurt the Jewish people.

“Many of the explanations of anti-Jewish attitudes and actions over the centuries, including mob violence and mass expulsions, have focused on things unique to Jews or unique to the Christian-Jewish relationship in Europe or the Muslim-Jewish relationship in the Middle East. Yet many of the same attitudes and actions—and some of the very same words and phrases—have been directed at other groups which have had none of the factors which are said to explain anti-Jewish attitudes and actions among Christians and Muslims. What these other groups—the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, Ibos in Nigeria, Marwaris in Burma, overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia, and Lebanese in a number of countries—have had in common with the Jews has not been religion, race, or language, but their economic and social roles.

These groups have all been, at some point in their history, “middleman minorities”—that is, people whose work takes place somewhere between producers and consumers, whether in retail trade or money-lending. Often these middleman minorities began at the petty level of a peddler with a pack on his back or a little pushcart. Even such large enterprises as Macy’s, Bloomingdale’s, and Levi Strauss among the Jews, and Haggar and Farah among the Lebanese, began at the level of the lowly peddler.”

-Thomas Sowell - “Is Anti-Semitism Generic?”

Since the Jewish people are uniquely unassimilable to other cultures, due to God’s specific cultural provisions for them, they tend to stick close together in the nations that they dwell. But, the Jewish culture, since it was constructed by God, is also uniquely successful in the lands that they dwell. But this means that their success is usually relegated to these “middleman” positions. Take this story in Exodus as an example. The Jews could not assimilate because they were shepherds, which the Egyptians hated. This was the original reason why they had to live in Goshen. So even though the Egyptians did not like shepherds, it was an occupation that they benefited from.

Thus, the Jews became massively successful within a vocation that the Egyptian people felt was beneath them. This unique success, that was relatively immune to the ups and downs of the Egyptian economy, on top of the fact that they are clearly foreigners within the land, would make people skeptical of them. This leads them into the same mistake of Pharaoh, fearing the minority population and trying to subjugate and oppress them. But, in many ways this is simply a repeat of the sin of Cain. Upon seeing his more successful brother, instead of learning from Abel’s faithfulness, Cain decides that Abel is the cause of his own failure. So instead of living up to the ideal of his brother, he murders his ideal in an attempt to become more successful. When a nation decides to do this, it marks the end of their civilization though. Once again quoting from Sowell:

“In many times and places, middleman minorities have been forced to flee for their lives from mobs or have been expelled en masse by political authorities. Yet the departure of

these supposed “parasites” and “exploiters” has not been followed by a more prosperous life by the rest of the population but usually by economic decline—sometimes catastrophic decline, as the economy of Uganda collapsed after middleman minorities from India and Pakistan were expelled during the 1970s. Similar things happened after the expulsions of Jews in Europe in various periods of history or other middleman minorities in parts of Asia.”

-Thomas Sowell - “Is Anti-Semitism Generic?”

None of this is to deny the chosen status of the Israelites, but actually it is meant to emphasize the point and to reveal the current wave of antisemitism that is sweeping the west right now. As the west struggles with our own economic problems, the Jewish people are once again looked at with skepticism. Not only because of their massive success, but also due to the major problems with open borders around the western world. This is compounded with the Jewish success in comparison to their surrounding Muslim neighbors.

And so, all of these points are converging at the same time, creating a very similar hostile world for the Jewish people. The mythologized version of World War 2 is collapsing with two new myths taking their place, the west is struggling financially, immigration is plaguing our civilizations, and we are rapidly falling away from God. These are the exact problems that coalesced at the start of World War 2, and it seems as though the same thing will happen once again.

The Fear of the Lord

“Then the king of Egypt spoke to the Hebrew midwives, of whom the name of one was Shiprah and the name of the other Puah; and he said, “When you do the duties of a midwife for the Hebrew women, and see them on the birthstools, if it is a son, then you shall kill him; but if it is a daughter, then she shall live.” But the midwives feared God, and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the male children alive. So the king of Egypt called for the midwives and said to them, “Why have you done this thing, and saved the male children alive?” And the midwives said to Pharaoh, “Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women; for they are lively and give birth before the midwives come to them.” Therefore God dealt well with the midwives, and the people multiplied and grew very mighty. And so it was, because the midwives feared God, that He provided households for them. So Pharaoh commanded all his people, saying, “Every son who is born you shall cast into the river, and every daughter you shall save alive.”

-Exodus 1:15-22

If all this is the case, how then should we live in this present darkness? I believe the answer to that question is found in the verses above. These two brave women were willing to stand up to the power of the Pharaoh, not because they were brave warriors, and not through leading a violent revolution, they simply refused to do what they knew to be wrong, and they did it because they feared the Lord.

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, But fools despise wisdom and instruction.”

-Proverbs 1:7

When the power structures are out of control and when it seems as though Satan has total control over the current course of events, it can feel hopeless to try to serve God. Our eyes can be lifted up to the helpless situation that we find ourselves in and we can lose heart. These two women didn't have a grand solution to their problems, nor did they know the effect of their simple act of defiance, but they committed themselves to the fear of the Lord.

This doesn't mean that they were “afraid” of God in a sense of terror, but they had developed in themselves a healthy respect and awe towards the God of the universe. It was this awe and wonder that allowed them to perform such a brave act. Oftentimes this is the source of true courage. It isn't feeling less fear, but instead feeling more afraid of something else. Like a parent who would run into a burning building to save their child, they don't feel an absence of fear for the flames, but they are instead driven by their greater fear that their child might die.

When Christians are consumed with the fears of this world, perhaps it means that we have forgotten the fear of the Lord. I think this quote from C.S. Lewis about the possibility of nuclear war sums this point up quite nicely:

“If we are all going to be destroyed by an atomic bomb, let that bomb when it comes find us doing sensible and human things—praying, working, teaching, reading, listening to music, bathing the children, playing tennis, chatting to our friends over a pint and a game of darts—not huddled together like frightened sheep and thinking about bombs. They may break our bodies... but they need not dominate our minds.”

-C.S. Lewis

When we remember the fear of the Lord, our eyes can be taken off of the circumstances that are far outside our sphere of control, and settle upon the simple things that God has asked us to be faithful to today. As we study this book, this point will become more apparent. It isn't the grand acts of disobedience that save the Jews, but simple acts of

faithfulness that God uses towards His purposes. Let us learn from these lessons and apply them faithfully towards our own lives.

“And if it seems evil to you to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”

—Joshua 24:15

